



United States District Court
Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division
219 South Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois 60604

Release Date:
October 5, 2018

Contact:
Julie Hodek
(312) 435-5693 (phone)
julie_hodek@ilnd.uscourts.gov

U.S. District Court Honors Judge George N. Leighton in Memorial Ceremony and Special Court History Museum Exhibit

Chicago, Ill.- The U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois honored Judge George N. Leighton, who passed away at the age of 105 on June 6, 2018, in a memorial ceremony and by unveiling a special exhibit, chronicling Judge Leighton's life, at the Court's History Museum.

"Our federal Court was proud to have Judge Leighton serve on our Court. The bottom line is that he left the world a better place because of his extraordinary legal and judicial career and tremendous public service. From his military service to his use of the law to bring about change peacefully, Judge Leighton will be remembered for his extraordinary courage and perseverance," said Chief Judge Rubén Castillo, who spoke at the memorial ceremony.

Members of Judge Leighton's family, law colleagues from his service on both the state and federal bench and his private practice, and friends spoke of his profound impact on our nation and his influence on their own lives and careers.

Judge Leighton, the son of immigrants from the Cape Verde Islands, grew up in Massachusetts. Despite never graduating from high school, he earned his undergraduate degree from Howard University. He was awarded a scholarship to Harvard Law School where his studies were interrupted in 1941 with the entrance of the United States into WWII. He served as an officer in the Army's 93rd Division and was awarded the Bronze Star. After the war, he returned to Harvard Law School, then graduated, passed the bar examination, and moved with his young family to Chicago in 1946.

As a young lawyer in Chicago, Judge Leighton became active in Chicago civic affairs. He helped integrate the Board of Managers of the Chicago Bar Association and served a term as president of the Chicago Branch of the NAACP. He was active in several cases that drew national attention, in particular, his 1951 representation of Harvey Clark, an African-American who attempted to move into an apartment in segregated Cicero. In a strange turn of events, Judge Leighton was arrested for inciting a riot by his representation of the Clarks. Throughout his career, he fought diligently to improve the balance of racial equality for all Americans. He was

instrumental in attaining voting rights for African Americans in the early 1950s through the 1960s. He also fought for school desegregation and the right of African Americans to serve on juries. Judge Leighton served as a Circuit Court Judge in Cook County from 1964 to 1969. He then went on to become the first African American District Appellate Court Justice in Illinois from 1969 to 1976. Judge Leighton was nominated to this Court by President Gerald R. Ford in 1975 and confirmed by the U.S. Senate on February 2, 1976. He served the District Court honorably until his retirement in 1987.

On November 5, 2018, Judge Leighton's final wish will be fulfilled as he will be laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery.

Speakers at the event included Chief Judge Rubén Castillo, Trayce Eileen, John Whitfield, Jeffrey Colman, Honorable William Bauer, Honorable Anne Burke, Emily Nicklin, Honorable Ann C. Williams (Ret.), Andrea Zopp, Langdon Neal, Honorable Sharon J. Coleman, Honorable Stanley Hill, and Stephen Belyn.

###

Photos by Jim Slonoff



Chief Judge Rubén Castillo, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois



Above: Judge Ann C. Williams (Ret.)

Below: Judge William Bauer, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit





Above: Judge Sharon Johnson Coleman, U.S. District for the Northern District of Illinois
Below: Justice Anne M. Burke, Illinois Supreme Court

